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# MURDER IN THE SKIES

## U.S. response to Soviet attack should be tough and measured

### NEWS ANALYSIS

By Richard Allen

*(Richard Allen, former national security adviser to President Reagan, wrote the following analysis of the Soviet downing of a South Korean airliner — which killed 269 people — for The Washington Times.)*

The Soviet act of mass destruction in shooting down an unarmed civilian airliner is heinous and dramatic — but not any more heinous or dramatic than Soviet actions in the past.

In fact, there has been a string of unexplained Soviet actions recently: The assassination of Benigno Aquino in the Philippines, the attack on our Marines in Lebanon and now this execution of more than 250 people aboard an unarmed Korean 747.

It's intriguing, too, that the Soviets moved these jet fighters into Sakhalin Island bases only about 10 days ago. I long ago ceased to believe in coincidence, even though the linkage in these incidents is tenuous. But it is reasonable to ask a big question: What is going on in the Soviet Union?

Is the situation out of control in the Kremlin? Doesn't the leadership there have an idea how monstrously an act like this will be considered across the world? Weren't the Soviet leaders aware of the consequences this would have? That air-to-air rocket that brought down a civilian aircraft accidentally intruding on Soviet airspace was analogous to a driver deciding to execute a death sentence on a pedestrian who was crossing the street on a yellow warning light.

It is possible that the awful mess could have been an accident — but not likely. Had one of the Soviet fighter pilots gone insane or had there been a maniac somewhere along in the Soviet command-and-control system, Defense Minister Ustinov would have known about the attack in five minutes. If the downing of the Korean airliner had been due, say, to the recklessness of some Soviet pilot or commander, why can't they say so? In that case, why not be candid, knowing how shattering the world reaction would be?

The Soviets have been incredibly lethargic in responding to this. They did not react at all until Secretary of State George Shultz went public with the results of our intelligence — probably signal intelligence. At that point they had to know that any lying explanation wouldn't wash.

So, again, we have to ask — did these ominous actions of late simply occur by chance, were they unrelated?

Let's remember that the Soviets have had strong indications in the past, from this country and other Western and industrial nations, that there will be outrage over one or another of their calculated actions — the invasion of Afghanistan as an obvious one. But hasn't the Kremlin deduced that outrage, however severe, will be temporary — that there is a tremendous inclination for the West to indulge in convenient amnesia, go back to business as usual as soon as possible because we don't want to disturb the "delicate balance" between East and West?

President Reagan is, I think, responding appropriately. Had he jumped in his plane in Santa Barbara and rushed back to Washington, he would have risked infusing a greater sense of crisis, needlessly at this time perhaps. His decision to return today, after the utterly inadequate comments from the Kremlin, is about the right calibration.

The crucial problem for the United States and the rest of the world — let's not forget the glaring international dimensions of this attack — is to guard against doing too little and then, in a few days or a few weeks, pretending nothing had happened. That course will be tempting to some people in some countries.

But, unfortunately, we don't have much leverage right now — our stick isn't very big. The steps that can and should be taken, though, ought to be relentlessly pursued.

The first task for the White House is inventorying the available options. Cancellation of the just-signed grain contract might be one: It could be an option for six days or six weeks even, but not beyond that. It might be well to immediately rescind the decision made just the other day to sell pipe-laying equipment to the Soviets.

As the president and his advisers study the facts to assign clear responsibility for the mass murders and determine the intent to the degree possible, the United States should keep relentless pressure on the Soviet Union for a complete and full explanation. We should also relentlessly — the word is worth

using again — mobilize nations around the world to completely restrict Soviet airline traffic and access to international airports and terminals because of this act of barbarism.

If the Soviets fail to respond, Secretary of State Shultz absolutely should not go to Madrid next week to meet with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, and this country and our allies certainly should not now put their signatures on a Helsinki Accords document that purports to protect human rights — it clearly is appropriate now to postpone that sort of international theatrics.

These actions, and a range of other possibilities that are obviously being urgently studied, should be combined with the most intense pressure again to insure that other nations do not fill the lacunae — as Australia, Canada and Argentina, for example, rushed to fill the commercial vacuum when the United States imposed its grain embargo after the invasion of Afghanistan.

One thing this incident has done is to underscore the dramatic need for increasing Japanese participation in the defense of the free world — and underscores as well the wisdom of Prime Minister Nakasone's decision to expand Japan's defensive capabilities. I expect that the Japanese will be absolutely horrified at this mass execution in the sky — as they should be.

If the linkage between these recent acts of violence is tenuous, as I said, we must remember that the Soviet Union seeks always to destabilize foreign governments. It welcomes cases in which governments, particularly the U.S. government, can be thrown into confusion.

Finally, the question really is: Does this obscene incident destroy the fabric of U.S.-Soviet relations? The answer is: No. Does it damage them, set them back significantly: Yes. It is the continuing relationship between the two powers that's at risk.

It is vital now, I think, that the president himself — and his is the only voice that counts — announce as promptly as possible what steps this country intends to pursue. The Soviet Union cannot escape the consequences of an act of this magnitude.

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